NATO AT 70
PEACE IN A CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

GINTA T. PALUBINSKAS

Seventy years after its inception, the international order is unraveling, and the international security terrain is changing. Europe is fragmented, Russia has expanded, and the United States has waffled in its stewardship of the liberal order. The solidarity between democratic nations that bound the international security order has declined. Populism and authoritarianism are on the rise, and democracy is under threat across the globe. The lack of cohesion between the United States and its European Allies and partners has called established relationships into question, complicated longstanding international issues, and eroded protections offered by NATO. This article examines NATO at 70 and assesses its ability to keep the peace in a changing security environment.

An examination of recurrent patterns in the transatlantic security environment, including a 70-year pattern of behavior by Russia, reveals the ongoing threat Russia poses and confirms the essential role NATO continues to play in maintaining peace in the twenty-first century. Findings show that Russia's strategy and foreign policy remain consistent over time. In particular, over the past 70 years, Russia's continued rejection of the West's goodwill has come at the cost of transatlantic security, Russia's development, and global stability. Despite the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia has inherited the Soviet Union's imperialistic mindset, continuing to straddle a fine line as a successor state while refusing to acknowledge the former's failures.

The end of the Cold War rapidly altered the transatlantic security environment and led to a series of questions and debates on the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Among these was the question of whether NATO was still necessary in the absence of the threat of Soviet expansionism. Scholars and practitioners largely agreed NATO was still needed.[1] Arguments in favor of maintaining the Alliance included the questionable durability of the changes occurring in the Soviet

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1. See Peter Corterier, "Quo Vadis NATO?," *Survival* 32, no. 2 (1990), https://doi.org/; Charles L. Glaser, "Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe," *International Security* 18, no. 1 (1993), https://doi.org/; William F. Hickman, "Nato: Is It Worth the Trouble?," *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 3 (1993): 36–46, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu; and John S. Duffield, "NATO's Functions after the Cold War," *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 5 (Winter 1994–1995), https://doi.org/.

Union, the existing imbalance in military power that favored the Soviet Union, the likelihood that the danger posed by Russia had not permanently disappeared, and the need to maintain stability in Europe.[2] Those advocating an end to the Alliance primarily argued NATO had served its purpose and was no longer needed or that the time had come to develop a new security structure in Europe.[3]

When NATO members decided to continue their alliance, the question of NATO's necessity was quickly supplanted by the question of whether the Alliance should accept new members. Those favoring enlargement focused on, among other things, NATO's importance to the continued effectiveness of the Alliance, its ability to deal with a resurgent Russia, Central and Eastern European democratization, economic transformation, and transatlantic stability.[4] Those opposed to NATO enlargement focused largely on Russia claiming, among other things, that Russia did not pose a threat. They argued that admitting new members to the Alliance would not spread democracy, but rather it would humiliate, isolate, and aggravate Russia, endanger its democratic reform, threaten its national security, damage its relationship with the West, and draw new dividing lines in Europe.[5]

As the relationship with Russia foundered, the debate shifted to the question of whether NATO enlargement was behind the decline in relations between Russia and the West. Some scholars asserted that NATO expansion had "become the key problem

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2. See James R. Huntley, "If the Cold War Is Waning, Is NATO Still Needed?," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 7, 1989, 19; Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to North Atlantic Council at Turnberry," Margaret Thatcher Foundation, June 7, 1990, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/; postscript by General Secretary Manfred Wörner in NATO, "NATO Facts and Figures 1989," 1989; and Glaser, "NATO Is Still Best."

3. See Jonathan Clarke, "Replacing NATO," *Foreign Policy*, no. 93 (1993), https://doi.org/; Eugene Carroll and Pat Schroeder, "It's Time to Consign NATO to History, and Look to Future," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1994, https://www.chicagotribune.com/; Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991), https://doi.org/; and "Gorbachev Says Cold War Over," *Tampa Bay Times*, October 17, 2005, https://www.tampabay.com/.

4. See Madeleine Albright, "Why Bigger Is Better," *Economist*, February 15, 1997; Stephen J. Blank, "Rhetoric and Reality in NATO Enlargement," in *European Security and NATO Enlargement: A View from Central Europe*, ed. Stephen Blank (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, April 1998), https://press.army warcollege.edu/; Volker Rühe, "Shaping Euro-Atlantic Policies: A Grand Strategy for a New Era," *Survival* 35, no. 2 (June 1, 1993), https://doi.org/10.1080/; and Karsten D. Voigt, "NATO Enlargement: A Holistic Approach for the Future," *SAIS Review (1989-2003)* 15, no. 2 (1995), https://www.jstor.org/.

5. See Alexei Arbatov, "NATO and Russia," *Security Dialogue* 26, no. 2 (1995), https://doi.org/; Michael Mandelbaum, "Preserving the New Peace: The Case against NATO Expansion," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1995), https://doi.org/; Dan Reiter, "Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001), https://doi.org/; and Karl-Heinz Kamp, "The Folly of Rapid NATO Expansion," *Foreign Policy*, no. 98 (1995): 126, https://doi.org/.

in U.S.–Russian security relations."[6] The Russian narrative held that the West deceived Russia and left it out of post-Cold War Europe.[7] Scholars have also claimed that during talks on German reunification, a promise was made not to expand NATO into Eastern Europe, a promise that was subsequently broken.[8] Interviews with Gorbachev, however, have confirmed that no such promise was made and that the agreements made at the time were subsequently honored.[9]

Others concluded the decline in relations between Russia and the West had less to do with any of NATO's actions than with Russia's frustration at its own political, economic, and military decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that Russia's turn against the West was driven by "status concerns rather than military threat perception."[10]

Russia's covert attack on Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 caused scholars to ask whether the West's relations with Russia could improve, and to question whether it would have been possible to develop a stable and cooperative partnership with Russia if NATO had not enlarged in the 1990s.[11] In 2014, Mark N. Katz argued Russia's relations with the West could not improve while President Vladimir Putin remained in power; Putin feared that good relations with the West would strengthen democratic forces and empower opposition to his rule in Russia.[12] A Westernized,

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6. Alexei Arbatov, "Eurasia Letter: A Russian-U.S. Security Agenda," *Foreign Policy*, no. 104 (1996): 103, https://doi.org/; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* (September 2014); Ruslan Pukhov, "NATO Is the Obstacle to Improving Russian-Western Relations," Defense News, March 28, 2019, https://www.defensenews.com/; and Andrey A. Sushentsov and William C. Wohlforth, "The Tragedy of US–Russian Relations: NATO Centrality and the Revisionists' Spiral," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (June 2020), https://link.springer.com/.

7. Mike Eckle, "Did the West Promise Moscow that NATO Would Not Expand? Well, It's Complicated.," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, May 19, 2021, https://www.rferl.org; and Jim Goldgeier, "Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin Was Told about NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters," War on the Rocks, November 22, 2019, https://warontherocks.com/.

8. See Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (April 2016), https://doi.org/; Marc Trachtenberg, "The United States and the NATO Non-Extension Assurances of 1990: New Light on an Old Problem?," *International Security* 45, no. 3 (January 2021), https://doi.org/; Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia," *Washington Quarterly* 32 (April 1, 2009), https://doi.org/; and Kramer and Mary Elise Sarotte, "No Such Promise," *Foreign Affairs* (November-December 2014), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/.

9. See Maxim Kórshunov, "Mikhail Gorbachev: I Am against All Walls," *RBTH*, October 16, 2014, https://www.rbth.com/.

10. Roland Dannreuther, *Russian Perceptions of the Atlantic Alliance,* Final Report for the NATO Fellowship 1995–1997, n.d., 38–39, https://www.nato.int/; and Kimberly Marten, "Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 2 (June 2018), https://doi.org/.

11. Mark N. Katz, "Can Russian-US Relations Improve?," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2014), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/; and Tuomas Forsberg and Graeme Herd, "Russia and NATO: From Windows of Opportunities to Closed Doors," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 2015), https://doi.org/.

12. Katz, "Russian-US Relations."

market-oriented, and democratized Russia would likely have approached its neighbors, NATO expansion, and the West with a greater sense of cooperation, since it would not have perceived democratization in the region and NATO expansion as a threat to Russia's national security under those circumstances.[13]

In 2015, other scholars concluded that "limits to cooperation were hard-wired into Russia's foreign policy philosophy."[14] A year later, Robert E. Hunter argued it wasn't clear whether there was "any formulation that Russia would have been willing to accept" regarding NATO enlargement and the future of power in Europe, "short of the dissolution of NATO and maybe not even that."[15] He concluded, "perhaps nothing the West could have proposed [would] have made possible a workable similarity of interests and practices between NATO and Russia" and prevented a return to the same kind of difficulties that precipitated the Cold War.[16]

This article picks up on that thread, assessing the need for NATO through an examination of recurrent patterns in the transatlantic security environment. This analysis allows for a more nuanced evaluation of Russia as a threat, the need for NATO, and NATO's role in maintaining peace in the twenty-first century. The article identifies a pattern in Russia's behavior that spans more than seven decades, helps account for the current state of affairs between Russia and the West, and adds to the current understanding of what drives the need for NATO today.

Background

Created in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was an elegant and effective response to a rising threat to Europe, democracy, and the liberal world order. It signaled that an attack on a NATO member state would lead to an encounter with a defensive force second to none. This rapidly stabilized the existing security situation and served as an effective deterrent to further Soviet expansion into Europe. Three basic factors ensured NATO's success: the promise of a unified response, the maintenance of sufficient military force coupled with the willingness to use it, and the ability to win.

A New World Emerges and Takes Shape (1945)

At the end of World War II, much of Europe's infrastructure had been destroyed, food was scarce, and millions of displaced Europeans struggled to find refuge. Initially, the Allied powers cooperated to repatriate refugees and bring order to war-torn Europe. But, as the work progressed, it became increasingly clear Russia was not in

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13. Katz, "Russian-US Relations."

14. Forsberg and Herd, "Windows of Opportunities," 54.

15. Robert E. Hunter, "NATO in Context: Geopolitics and the Problem of Russian Power," *PRISM* 6, no. 2 (July 2016): 12, http://cco.ndu.edu/.

16. Hunter, "NATO in Context," 12.

sync with its wartime allies, did not abide by international conventions, and sought a different peace than the rest of the world.

When assessing the situation at the end of the war, seasoned diplomats reached the same conclusion: the Soviets were seeking to grab as much territory as possible. Maxim Litvinov, a prominent Soviet diplomat who had served as commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1933 to 1939 and as the Soviet ambassador to the United States from 1941 to 1943, interpreted the situation as one in which the primary cause of the emerging schism between the wartime allies was the Soviet Union's "striving for power and influence too far in excess of its reasonable security requirements."[17]

He identified the secondary cause as "the West's failure to resist that effort early enough."[18] He observed that Soviet leaders "refused to believe that goodwill could possibly constitute the lasting basis of any policy . . . . [opting instead] to grab 'all they could while the going was good.'"[19] Eventually, the Soviet Union pursued its expansionist policy with such vigor that Litvinov saw no hope in reversing the trend toward confrontation. Asked whether the situation would be improved if the West agreed to Soviet demands, Litvinov responded that it would simply lead to the West being presented with additional Soviet ultimatums.[20]

Litvinov believed Moscow had chosen to act aggressively in the war's aftermath not because of anything that the Western democracies had done, but rather because they had failed to act in the face of what the Soviet Union had chosen to do. That is, the Soviet Union pursued a policy of aggression "not so much because the Anglo-American attitude had stiffened . . . but rather because it had not stiffened enough."[21]

Similarly, Loy W. Henderson, a US diplomat whose experience in the region began shortly after the end of World War I and continued through World War II, and his colleagues who had been observing the Soviet Union over the years drew similar conclusions to Litvinov's at the end of the war. Their observations led them to conclude "that no amount of blandishment, no amount of persuasiveness, no bribes, and no concessions could divert the Soviet Union from its basic objectives" and that placating the Soviets was a mistake.[22] Henderson noted that while the Soviets were willing to change tactics when necessary, "they would not alter their basic objectives."[23]

Henderson concluded that the Soviet Union would not only seek to retain control over the territories that its forces already occupied but would also seek to seize "as

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17. Vojtech Mastny, "Reconsiderations: The Cassandra in the Foreign Commissariat," *Foreign Affairs* 54, no. 2 (January 1976): 373, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/.

18. Mastny, "Cassandra," 373.

19. Mastny, "Cassandra," 374.

20. Rogers P. Churchill and William Slany, eds., *Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, vol. 6, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), Document 517, https://history.state.gov/.

21. Mastny, "Cassandra," 373.

22. Loy W. Henderson, Oral History interview by Richard D. McKinzie, June 14, 1973, transcript, 20, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov.

23. Henderson, Oral History Interview, 21.

much additional territory as it might extract from its indecisive Western Allies." This conclusion was confirmed by Litvinov's 1946 postwar acknowledgment that the Soviet Union sought to grab all that it could "while the going was good," and his "alarming suggestion that its appetite may be insatiable." [24]

Nine months after the war, George Kennan, the US chargé d'affaires in Moscow, provided a comprehensive assessment of the situation and set the stage for the US policy of containment. In what became known as the Long Telegram, Kennan conveyed that the Soviet Union believed itself to be in perpetual conflict with the West and was engaging in a long-term strategy to surreptitiously deepen conflicts within and between capitalist countries in order to enable the advance of communism.

Kennan advised that the Soviet Union understood and respected the logic of force above all else and thus, if its adversary "has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so."[25] He warned the Soviets would seek to "undermine the general political and strategic potential of major western powers," by exploiting their societal fissures to create circumstances in which, "poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents" in order to increase social unrest, "disrupt national self confidence . . . and to stimulate all forms of disunity" in Western democracies.[26]

Kennan understood the Soviets did not seek peace; instead, they sought to undermine democratic societies and spread their political, economic, and social system throughout the world. As a result, he concluded diplomacy alone would not be enough to navigate the international environment that had emerged.

That the peace which Europe sought would prove elusive without an economic recovery was evident to both Russia and its former Western allies. Their response to Europe's postwar crisis would define and shape the postwar world. The former wartime allies could unite for the sake of lasting peace, or they could remain divided. The United States offered the former through the Marshall Plan; Russia chose the latter, understanding that an economically stable Europe would mean the countries of Western Europe would slip beyond its grasp.

While the United States developed the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Union continued to destabilize Europe. At the end of February of 1948, Czechoslovakia collapsed, extinguishing the last democracy in Eastern Europe and further expanding Soviet power. This prompted Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to sign a common defense pact.

When Russia condemned the alliance, accusing its members of undermining peace and "assisting the instigators and organizers of a new war," Belgium noted the Treaty of Brussels had been concluded out of fear of the Soviet Union, which was the only country that had emerged from the war having conquered other territories and taken power in neighboring states and after the war, had sought to gain and control increas-

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24. Henderson, Oral History Interview, 37; and Mastny, "Cassandra," 374.
25. Churchill and Slany, *Eastern Europe*, Document 475.
26. Churchill and Slany, *Eastern Europe*, Document 475.

ingly more territory.[27] It implored the Soviet Union to stop sabotaging the United Nations' work and to work with the other UN members to help ensure international peace.

Nevertheless, by the autumn of 1948, the United Nations was stymied by the Soviet Union's abuse of its veto. Europe and the United States recognized Russia's program of expansion had to be countered through containment if international peace was to be maintained. Consequently, they worked together to fortify the peace by forming a more formidable defense alliance intended to suppress Russia's westward expansion. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization emerged in the spring of 1949 as the "natural and logical supplement to the economic aid being provided to the western European states by the Marshall Plan."[28]

Why NATO? (1949)

The move to form NATO raised the question, Why do we need the North Atlantic Treaty if we have the UN? Then-US Secretary of State Dean Acheson provided the answer. He explained that the postwar system to maintain peace and security was not working because the Soviet Union was purposefully misusing its veto to interfere with the UN Security Council's ability to maintain international peace. Because of this, the North Atlantic pact was needed to achieve peace and security and to prevent war.[29]

The formation of NATO on April 4, 1949 was a deeply considered, measured response to nearly four years of Soviet postwar actions in Europe. The founding of NATO marked the Western democracies' coming to terms with the existing situation and sent two very clear signals. First, it signaled that the signatories were committed to the UN Charter and were joining together to do what the United Nations was being prevented from doing. And, second, they made it known, in no uncertain terms, that they would not be picked off, one by one, by any aggressor. NATO was the collective transatlantic response to the Soviet threat to world peace. In short, because the Soviet Union was working to undermine the existing system, NATO was formed to preserve it.

The Cold War (1949–89)

The formation of NATO changed the potential for a hot war to a cold war. The Alliance was an effective deterrent to war in Europe and an effective guarantor of North

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27. See Vyshinsky (USSR) comments in United Nations, 143rd Plenary Meeting, Palais de Chaillot, Paris, September 25, 1948: (General Assembly, 3rd Session), 129–30, United Nations Digital Library, http://digitallibrary.un.org/; and Spaak (Belgium) comments in United Nations, 147th Plenary Meeting, Palais de Chaillot, Paris, September 28, 1948: (General Assembly, 3rd Session), 281, United Nations Digital Library, http://digitallibrary.un.org/.

28. Grayson Kirk, "The Atlantic Pact and International Security," *International Organization* 3, no. 2 (1949): 242, http://www.jstor.org/stable/.

29. "Text of Secretary Acheson's Broadcast on Atlantic Accord," *New York Times*, March 19, 1949, http://movies2.nytimes.com/.

Atlantic peace. From NATO's founding in 1949 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Europe lived in relative peace without suffering another military attack from its Eastern neighbor. The Soviet Union continued to disparage the alliance and to cast NATO as an aggressor that it feared. In reality, it feared meeting a united front of countries joined in protecting their sovereignty and unified by the values enshrined in the UN Charter.

The NATO alliance was needed during the Cold War to serve as a bulwark for peace and to stabilize a situation that had the potential to lead to another war if left unchecked. At the time, postwar Europe was subject to two distinct systems competing for its future. One was being promoted by an external force, which sought to capture Europe through coercion. The other was one the European nations themselves were actively pursuing, relying on like-minded nations for support in maintaining their sovereignty and a lasting peace. The Alliance was needed to prevent a hot war from erupting in Europe. It achieved this end through a clear and unflagging commitment to the security of its members backed by a credible level of military forces that could offer successful resistance to any attack on them.

Post–Cold War (1989–2014)

When the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, NATO continued to serve as a stabilizing force during an uncertain time. Neither Russia nor the countries emerging from the defunct Soviet system viewed NATO as a threat. For countries reasserting their independence, NATO offered the promise of permanent protection from a revanchist Russia, which many believed would emerge in a matter of time. For Russia, which had lost its empire, it offered the promise of a safe emergence into the post-Cold War security environment.

As had been the case following the end of World War II, Western democracies hoped they could build a long-lasting, cooperative relationship with Russia, now heir to the Soviet Union. They did not want to believe Russia's post-Soviet aims were irreconcilable with theirs. And their good will was once again on full display as they responded to a former adversary in crisis with compassionate generosity.

In 1990, when Soviet leadership appealed directly for US and Western food and medical aid, Western governments responded quickly. In 1991, they provided billions of dollars of assistance to the Soviets. The influx of Western aid helped stabilize the Soviet Union, which continued to disintegrate from within. When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Western democracies provided Russia and the other countries emerging from the Soviet Union with a steady stream of financial assistance, as well as help in integrating into the world economy and international organizations.

At the time, there was hope Russia would emerge a democracy and the world would enjoy a long and abiding peace. And then there was the question—why do we need NATO?

For some, the answer was clear—NATO is needed to protect its members from any and all countries that would attack them. While the Soviet Union had represented the greatest threat during the Cold War, by definition the Alliance protected its members

against more than just the Soviet Union. Therefore the disappearance of the Soviet Union did not eliminate the need for the Alliance. The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not guarantee NATO members' security. It simply alleviated a known threat. It did not eliminate all possible threats.

At the end of the Cold War, Russia's basic objectives did not change. It sought to recapture its former sphere of influence, reintegrate the Russian empire, and re-emerge as a great power. But Russia was weak and not in a position to challenge the West, so it altered its tactics to suit the circumstances. Using its weakness to its advantage, Russia accepted the West's financial assistance and support as it integrated into international economic structures, simultaneously gathering strength and weighing its readiness to challenge the West.

Though Russia faced no threat from the West, NATO was perceived as an instrument that could interfere with Russia's ability to achieve its expansionist goals once it had regrouped and was back on its historical course. As a consequence, NATO had to be undermined. Here, Russia took a new tack. Instead of pursuing its traditional goal of undermining NATO unity, it sought to insinuate itself into NATO decision making in an effort to create a situation in which "excluding Russia . . . would make achieving peace impossible."[30]

This strategy positioned Russia to act as the spoiler in world peace. It was also reminiscent of the approach that the Soviet Union took when abusing its veto in the UN Security Council, which led to the formation of NATO. And it reflected the same hostility toward the West that had driven Soviet foreign policy when Andrei Gromyko, who served as the Soviet Foreign Minister from 1959 to 1987, asserted that "no international question of any consequence could be decided 'without the Soviet Union or in opposition to it.' "[31]

In the West, arguments were made for and against NATO enlargement. Three recurring arguments against NATO enlargement emerged: NATO enlargement will provoke Russia; NATO enlargement will create new dividing lines in Europe; and, NATO enlargement is expensive. Each argument suggested the cost of enlarging NATO exceeded the benefit. Each of these arguments also omitted a critical factor: the primary cause of the emerging situation was Russia's drive for "power and influence too far in excess of its reasonable security requirements" much like that of the Soviet Union after World War II.[32]

As discussed earlier, at the time, Litvinov concluded Moscow had chosen to act aggressively not because of anything that the Western democracies had done, but rather because they had failed to act in the face of what the Soviet Union had chosen

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30. Arbatov, "NATO and Russia," 142.

31. Michael Mandelbaum, "Introduction: Russian Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective," in *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (Washington DC: Council on Foreign Relations, July 1998), https://www.cfr.org.

32. Mastny, "Cassandra," 373.

to do.[33] At the end of the Cold War, the same thing occurred: Western democracies did not do anything to provoke Moscow's aggression, yet the Kremlin acted aggressively. Confronted with increasing Russian aggression in Europe, Western democracies decided to enlarge NATO.

The enlargement of NATO did not occur suddenly or unexpectedly. The Alliance only began accepting new members in 1999, a decade after the end of the Cold War. Once the enlargement process began, 12 countries joined the Alliance over the span of 10 years (1999–2009). With each enlargement, NATO grew stronger and Europe became more stable. Eighteen years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, 25 (57 percent) of the 44 countries in Europe were members of NATO. The majority of countries of the continent stood together in a common defense alliance: they would not go to war with one another and they would defend each other if attacked. Peace in Europe seemed assured.

Despite the West's efforts, post-Cold War dividing lines appeared in Europe. Some blamed the West, positing that it had "missed an opportunity to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture (on an equal basis)."[34] But facts show otherwise. Russia has had little interest in avoiding confrontation with its neighbors in the twenty-first century. And it had no interest in joining NATO.[35] Rather than missing an opportunity to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, the West missed the opportunity to integrate countries, such as Georgia and Ukraine, into NATO through its effort to placate Russia.

Following the Cold War, Russia actively attacked Europe where it is most vulnerable, rending countries off the path to EU and NATO membership, creating wedges, and exploiting divisions in an effort to destabilize the continent and reorder it for its own purposes. To this end, Russia employed a variety of approaches. It used its energy resources in an effort to gain political leverage over Europe through the development of a natural gas monopoly. It cut off the flow of natural gas to demonstrate its power to countries largely dependent on it for resources.

Russia also sought to intimidate its democratic neighbors. It conducted regular incursions into their airspace, violated their territorial waters, harassed navy ships, dogged military jets and surveillance planes, simulated nuclear attacks on other countries, and flew its military aircraft into foreign airspace with transponders turned off to show it was

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33. Mastny, "Cassandra," 376.

34. Tom Sauer, "The Origins of the Ukraine Crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West," *Global Policy* 8, no. 1 (2017): 82, https://doi.org/.

35. *Debate on NATO Enlargement, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate*, 105th Cong. (October 9, 1997) (statement of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State and response to Senator Wellstone's question regarding whether Russia could join NATO), https://www.govinfo.gov/.

not bound by international rules and values.[36] It launched cyberattacks against NATO member states and those aspiring to join the Alliance.[37] It fomented civil discord in neighboring states.[38] It funded far-right and anti-EU political parties and supported disruptive activities in neighboring democracies.[39] Russia weaponized citizenship through passportization campaigns.[40] It meddled in foreign elections.[41]

It also modernized its military and tested it in countries that lack protection. It systematically expanded into neighboring states through a process of creeping annexation, violating international law and inching its way toward Europe. In short, Russia actively presented itself as a threat to European states through calculated acts of aggression on land, air, sea, and in cyberspace, as well as through disinformation campaigns, the creation of false narratives, and threats up to and including nuclear attacks against them. Kidnappings, poisonings, and killings carried out by Russia abroad further instilled the sense that Russia considered itself above international law.

Rather than accepting that goodwill could constitute the lasting basis of foreign relations and focusing its efforts on democratizing, restructuring its economy, and raising its people's quality of life, post-Soviet Russia sought to disrupt the emergence of a lasting peace in Europe. Over the course of a quarter century, it proved itself to be a master of employing "[p]rovocative acts, adequately spaced, [to] leave an impression . . . without generating a response."[42]

36. "Russia Flexes Its Military Muscles with Western Airspace Violations," Deutsche Welle, April 4, 2010, https://www.dw.com; Barbara Starr, "Pentagon: 2 Russian Aircraft Buzzed U.S. Warship," CNN, September 17, 2010, http://www.cnn.com; "Russian Aggression Drives Swedish Defense Spending," Defense News, February 7, 2016, https://www.defensenews.com; and "Russian Military Jet Nearly Collides with Passenger Plane–Again," Deutsche Welle, December 13, 2014, https://www.dw.com.

37. See Ian Traynor, "Russia Accused of Unleashing Cyberwar to Disable Estonia," *Guardian*, May 17, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com; Valentinas Mite, "Attacks Seen as First Case of 'Cyberwar,'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 20, 2007, https://www.rferl.org; John Markoff, "Before the Gunfire, Cyberattacks," *New York Times*, August 12, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com; and Robert Windrem, "Timeline: Ten Years of Russian Cyber Attacks on other Nations," NBC News, December 18, 2016, https://www.nbcnews.com.

38. *Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security*, Minority Staff Report prepared for the use of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 115th Cong. (January 10, 2018), https://www.govinfo.gov.

39. See Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Putin's Western Allies," *Foreign Affairs*, March 27, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com; and Rick Noack, "The European Parties Accused of Being Influenced by Russia," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com.

40. See Mark Mackinnon, "Russian Passports Anger Georgia," *Globe and Mail*, July 2, 2002, https://www.theglobeandmail.com.

41. See Lucan Ahmad Way and Adam Casey, "Russia Has Been Meddling in Foreign Elections for Decades. Has It Made a Difference?," *Washington Post*, January 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com; and Maggie Tennis, "Russia Ramps up Global Elections Interference: Lessons for the United States," Center for Strategic and International Studies (website), July 20, 2020, https://www.csis.org.

42. Kyle Mizokami, "Russia Is Stealthily Threatening America with Nuclear War," *The Week*, September 16, 2014, https://theweek.com/.

Western democracies initially viewed these provocations as reflections of Russia's insecurity, something that could be overcome through goodwill and diplomacy. They worked to develop a partnership with what they hoped would be a democratic Russia. When Russia began to reemerge as an imperial challenge to European security, Western policymakers and political leaders called for Russia to join the West as a post-imperial power. But Russia's desire for expansion eclipsed its perceived gains from democracy and peace.

Navigating a Shifting Security Environment (2014–20)

In 2014, after modernizing its military for the better part of a decade, Russia opted for empire over modern statehood. Unthreatened and unprovoked, Russia attacked Ukraine, which had been promised NATO membership in 2008 but had not yet been accepted.[43] In doing so, Russia defined itself and staked out its position with regard to its neighbors and the international system. Consequently, a shift occurred in the international security environment that had serious implications for NATO and the rules-based international order.

After the Cold War ended, Russia emerged as a defeated power—it had lost the struggle with capitalism. For many, Russia appeared to stand at a critical juncture, a crossroads that would allow it to become a "normal" country. Russia had the choice of becoming a stable and effective state (a normal country) or seeking to reemerge as an empire.

It did not take long for Russia's deep-rooted imperialistic tendencies to reassert themselves publicly, even under Boris Yeltsin, who had been voted in as Russia's first democratic-leaning president. In 1999, during a meeting with Clinton, Yeltsin openly and unabashedly asked that Clinton give Europe to Russia. "I ask you one thing. Just give Europe to Russia. The U.S. is not in Europe. Europe should be the business of the Europeans. Russia is half European and half Asian."[44] Yeltsin then insisted, "Bill, I'm serious. Give Europe to itself. Europe has never felt as close to Russia as it does now. We have no difference of opinion with Europe."[45]

After eight years of support, talks, negotiations, and peace with NATO countries, Yeltsin, Russia's first president, confidently and unambiguously expressed Russia's intentions toward Europe. Russia did not see European countries as partners, but rather as states that it sought to dominate and as countries that could be given and taken without their consent.

Initially, Russia's expansionism manifested itself close to its borders in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. But by 2007, Russia had used its natural resources, bilateral agreements, and position on the UN Security Council so effectively in this pursuit

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43. David Brunnstrom and Susan Cornwell, "NATO Promises Ukraine, Georgia Entry One Day," Reuters, April 3, 2008, https://www.reuters.com/.

44. "Memorandum of Conversation – President Boris Yeltsin of Russia," November 19, 1999, 3, Memcons and Telecons, Clinton Digital Library, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/.

45. "Memorandum of Conversation," 4.

that the EU found it had "allowed its relationship with Russia to be organised in a way that diminishes its own potential power and boosts Russia's."[46] In 2008, Russia's thinly veiled grand strategy lost all of its subtlety when it mounted an indirect challenge to NATO through its war on Georgia, which had been promised NATO membership.[47]

Russia's response to the West's protests was consistent with its historical pattern. In a manner reminiscent of Russia's earlier contentions that no international questions of any consequence could be decided without Russia or in opposition to it, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov dismissed the West's concerns.

> Everyone should accept the new realities on the ground. . . . Our decisions taken after the war begun by Georgia are irreversible and they should be accounted for in practical matters.[48]

As far as Russia was concerned, the matter had been decided and the rest of the world would have to adjust to its decision. The West accepted this largely as an expression of Russia's resolve to dominate its traditional sphere of influence.

In 2014, Russia upped the ante again by surreptitiously attacking Ukraine and illegally annexing Crimea. Through its attack on Ukraine, its subsequent actions, and the official statements that followed, Russia definitively revealed itself as a state that does not honor its word, does not consider itself bound by international law, continues to define itself in opposition to the West, and fundamentally rejects the values that undergird the liberal international order.

In a move that showed utter disregard for the UN Charter, Russia misused its veto to block a UN Security Council resolution aimed at reaffirming Ukraine's "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity."[49] By doing so, Russia purposefully interfered with the role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.

In March 2014, international relations had come full circle: they were back to where they had been at the start of the Cold War when the Soviet Union, Russia's predecessor in the UN Security Council, had regularly abused its veto to impede the proper functioning of the UN and thereby created the circumstances that brought about the need for NATO.

Russia had once again shown the UN could be rendered powerless by any permanent member of the Security Council using its veto to prevent the application of sanctions against itself or any other state guilty of aggression. It had also reconfirmed the United Nations could not guarantee collective security against aggression, which underscored the importance of NATO in the preservation of European peace and security in the post-Cold War era and beyond.

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46. Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, "A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations," policy paper (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2007), 10, https://ecfr.eu/.

47. Brunnstrom and Cornwell, "NATO Promises."

48. Gregory Feifer, "Frictions Fuel Fears of New Conflict," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, June 29, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/.

49. "UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked," UN News, March 15, 2014, https://news.un.org/.

As a result, a tectonic shift occurred in NATO and EU countries' understanding of the transatlantic security environment, and in their approach to Russia. NATO suspended its practical cooperation with Russia, and its members stopped cutting their defense budgets and began increasing their defense funding instead. Western democracies imposed harsh sanctions and refused to recognize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. They made clear, in practical terms, that Russia was not exempt from international law and would not be allowed to undermine the liberal international order. The time for optimism had passed: Western democracies would have to deal with Russia as it was, not as they wished it to be.

Instead of reversing course, Russia increasingly presented itself as a threat to Western Europe and NATO member states through calculated acts of aggression. These included cyberattacks; support for far-right and anti-EU political parties, support for disruptive activities in Western democracies, and meddling in foreign elections. Russia targeted NATO member states and potential members with disinformation campaigns including the creation of false narratives. It exacerbated refugee flows into Europe and threatened these countries with nuclear attacks.

In the years since its 2014 attack on Ukraine, Russia has leaned into undermining Western democracies, all the while insisting it wants better relations with the West. In doing so, Russia has revealed its real preference: while it says it wants positive relations with the West, it aspires to weaken, divide, and immobilize Western democracies by sowing confusion, discord, and fear.

Russia's goal is to supplant the values at the heart of the liberal international order with its own rather than adhere to existing international norms. To achieve this end, Russia has made use of EU and NATO member state "pre-existing cleavages and shortcomings—be they neglected minorities, threatened majorities, biased media outlets, home-grown corruption, insufficient law enforcement, or disillusionment with politics."[50] It has watched and waited for opportunities to exploit societal fissures and openings for Russian messaging and to fan arguments that would estrange NATO members from one another.

If Russia can succeed in dividing European democracies, then it can potentially tear apart the EU, a thorn in its side domestically and a barrier to its expansion. More importantly, if it can divide the transatlantic democracies enough to lead to a dissolution of NATO, then Russia will have rid itself of the greatest barrier to its expansion westward and across the European continent.

For its part, NATO continues to protect its members from being picked off by Russia, as it did at its inception. More than 70 years after its founding, the Alliance continues to adapt to new security threats, faithfully guarding the transatlantic community against instability and unpredictability in a shifting security environment. It remains an effective shield between its members and Russia, which still aims to take just as much additional territory as the situation will permit. And NATO's effectiveness con-

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50. Kadri Liik, "Winning the Normative War with Russia: An EU-Russia Power," Policy Brief (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2018), 6, https://ecfr.eu/.

tinues to be reflected in Russia's choice of victims: Russia does not attack members of the Alliance.

Conclusion

Why NATO?

Russia's attack on Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the events that followed clarified the state of the transatlantic security environment and provided a concise answer to the question of why NATO is needed today. The Alliance is needed now for the same reason it was needed when it was created. Now, as then, the UN cannot guarantee collective security against aggression. Transatlantic countries continue to face the same threat, albeit in a different form, that existed when NATO was established. The Alliance has proven effective in its mission for more than seven decades and continues to be necessary for the preservation of transatlantic security and, by extension, the liberal international order. In short, we need NATO in order to maintain world peace.

Can NATO Endure?

The NATO alliance and the context within which it operates have changed significantly over time. At its inception, NATO focused on the security of Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. Today, it protects the majority of European countries, as well as the United States and Canada. It is comprised of 30 Allies, protects almost one billion people on both sides of the Atlantic, and represents half of the world's military and economic might.

The challenges NATO faces and the environment in which it operates are also notably different than those that existed when the Alliance was created. In 1949, NATO guarded against the threat of military attack that could be countered through traditional military strengths. At that time, the Soviet Union was the primary threat to the Alliance.

Today, NATO is deterring Russian expansion rather than Soviet expansion, facing an adversary that readily deploys the means of hybrid warfare against its targets in order to achieve its political goals. It is an aggressor that has successfully melded hybrid warfare with information, cyber, diplomatic, political, economic, and social means of warfare.[51] Russia is a continually evolving apex predator. Consequently, NATO operates in a rapidly changing and unpredictable environment fueled in large part by a state that operates outside the bounds of international law and works to foil the international system while simultaneously insisting no international question may be resolved without it.

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51. Tad A. Schnaufer II, "Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-Linear War against the West," *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 1 (2017): 19, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/.

Permanently on guard, NATO has successfully adapted to political, economic, and social changes that have altered the international security environment over the course of more than seven decades. The Alliance is the transatlantic community's perpetual guardian, its constantly evolving primary line of defense. As such, it remains an essential component of transatlantic security and the liberal international order. But, can it endure?

Currently, every indication is that NATO is a durable compact: all of its 16 long-time members have remained in the Alliance, 14 new members have joined since the end of the Cold War, and additional countries have joined NATO's Partnership for Peace with the hope of becoming members of the pact. Despite some assertions that NATO and the ideas that underpin the liberal world order are obsolete, NATO's image has improved on both sides of the Atlantic amid growing security concerns. And it is generally "seen in a positive light across publics within the alliance."[52] The benefits of membership far outweigh the costs. The price of peace costs less than the price of war and rebuilding.

Maintaining Peace in the Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century transatlantic security environment has largely been shaped by a revanchist Russia, which has emerged as the single greatest threat to transatlantic peace and security in the post-Cold War era. Over the course of the past 30 years, Russia's foreign policies and actions have fallen into well-defined historical patterns. Russia's resurgent expansionism, use of force to change borders, abuse of its UN Security Council veto, and its hostility toward its neighbors and the liberal international order have created comparable conditions to those that led to NATO's creation in 1949.

The Alliance's success in maintaining transatlantic peace and security through deterrence, along with Litvinov's, Henderson's, and Kennan's post–World War II observations, provides policymakers with important insights into how to approach today's transatlantic security situation and how to value NATO. In short, Litvinov pointed out that Russia's desire to expand is insatiable; Henderson observed that its goals never change; and Kennan advised that Russia understands and respects the logic of force above all else.[53] NATO has been an effective and durable alliance, one that continues to be a timely and elegant response to the dangers facing transatlantic peace in the twenty-first century. NATO remains the most effective means of ensuring peace for years to come. **Æ**

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52. Moira Fagan and Jacob Poushter, "NATO Viewed Favorably across Member States," Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (blog), February 10, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/.

53. Churchill and Slany, *Eastern Europe*, Document 475.